



Al-Risala 1984

March

2 March 1984

Editorial

Africa Shows the Way How to Achieve Unity

According to a report published in the *Times of India*, January 29, 1984, the African member of the United Nations, although often driven by differences and disagreements on international matters at home, do possess an ability to reach a consensus on such affairs within the framework of the U.N.

The African position does, in fact, represent a factor of considerable importance in the workings of the U.N. The African countries represent nearly one-third of the total 159 nation memberships in the General Assembly; with that kind of voting strength, any agreement among the African countries is virtually certain to be adopted by the members as a whole.

Mrs. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, chief U.S. delegate, and others have contended that other regional groups, in comparison to the Africans, are far less able to achieve agreement among their members.

For example, the Africans have already decided that the delegate from Zambia, Mr. Paul Lusaka, will be the president of the 39th General Assembly, which opens in September, it will be the turn of an African to serve in the post, which rotates among the major regional groups.

By contrast, in the General Assembly concluded last month, when it was up to the Latin American group to choose the president. They were unable to agree on a candidate, and the issue had finally to be settled by a vote on the full membership.

How do countries as diverse as radical Libya and moderate Egypt, Marxist Mozambique and conservative Zaire manage to find common positions.

Some diplomats in the U.N. contend that African unanimity is achieved only by avoiding potentially contentious issues, such as the Libyan occupation of parts of Chad, over which the African countries themselves are deeply divided.

But surely if unity among disparate groups is considered a worthy goal, the only sure ways of achieving it are concentration on consensus-building questions and avoidance of contentious issues. It is in this, surely, that Africa has led the way.

QUR'AN: The Preserved Book of God

The fifth Surah of the Quran states:

Today I have concluded for you your religion, and I have completed my favour upon you, and I have approved Islam as your religion. (Quran, 5:3)

Some people have taken this verse to mean that previous religions were incomplete, and that they were only made complete with the religion of the final Prophet, Mohammad, may peace be upon him. But this interpretation is mistaken. By 'conclusion of religion' in this verse is meant conclusion of the Book of God which had been revealed to Prophet Mohammad over a period of 23 years. This is the last verse of the Quran to be revealed and marks the completion to the Book of God in Arabic. The meaning of this verse is not that the religion which God had been sending down since the beginning of human history had gradually been developing and had now taken on its final and complete form. It is the revelatory completion of the Quran in Arabic that is referred to, not the evolutionary completion of divine religion as a whole.

There is, essentially, one Book of divine guidance. That Book has been called *Ummul Kitab* (The Essence of the Book) in the Quran. The divine scriptures were editions of this Ummul Kitab, revealed to the different Prophets. The difference between one Scripture and another is one of language and style. There is no question of one Scripture being complete and another incomplete.

After the final Prophet, however, the only way to salvation is by means of the Quran and Islam. Following previous scriptures and religions cannot now earn one salvation. But there is only one reason for this: the fact that the Quran is preserved in its original form whereas other religions are not. The Quran still exists as it was revealed, but previous Scriptures have been altered and are not now as they originally were. This difference between the Quran and other Scriptures is a historical fact that cannot be doubted on any academic grounds. Clearly, only that edition of the Book of God which exists in its original form will be a source of guidance and salvation for man. Scriptures which have been altered by man – which do not even exist in their original form – will never be able to provide man with guidance and salvation.

How was it that the Quran was preserved whereas previous Scriptures were not? The only reason for this was that in this world a powerful community is required to preserve the Book of God – a community which is able to ward off every threat to the integrity of the Scriptures. The Quran was the only divine Scripture to bring about a revolution of such universal proportions that a large community gathered around it – a community that was strong enough to ensure that the Book of God was preserved in its original form.

The scale of the revolution which the Quran brought about was unprecedented in human history. During the Prophet's lifetime Islam had spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Within one hundred years of the Prophet's death his followers had subdued most of the inhabited world. The enemies of monotheism were – on a universal level – either obliterated or vanquished.

Islam continued to dominate the world scene, until eventually man entered the age of the press. Now, there was no possibility of any changes or additions being made in the Book of God. The task of preservation of the Quran had been accomplished for all time.

RISING ABOVE LOVE AND HATE IN ONE'S DEALINGS

When the Prophet emigrated from Mecca, the keys of the *Ka'aba* were with Uthman Ibn Talha. They had been in his family since ancient times. Before the emigration, the Prophet had asked Uthman for the keys, and Uthman had refused to hand them over. Furthermore, he spoke abusively to the Prophet. The Prophet bore all his rude remarks. All he said in reply was: "Uthman, perhaps you will see that one day I will have these keys in my hands. I will have the power to dispose of them as I will" "It will be a day of disgrace and woe for the Quraish when the keys of the *Ka'aba* are handed over to one like you," Uthman retorted. After the Conquest of Mecca, the Prophet reigned supreme. He asked for the keys of the *Ka'aba*, and was holding them in his hand when his cousin and son-in-law, Ali Ibn Abu Talib, stood up and asked for them to be handed over to him. The Prophet did not reply to Ali, and asked where Uthman Ibn Talha was. When he came forward, the Prophet said to him: "Uthman, here are your keys; this is a day of righteousness and fulfillment of promises."

The Prophet of Islam

It is written in the Quran:

Mohammad is no more than a prophet: other prophets have passed away before him. (3:144)

This verse shows that the Prophet of Islam, may peace be upon him, and God's blessings, was just a prophet like all the other prophets. There is no hierarchical difference between him and other prophets. All the prophets have brought one and the same religion. No prophet was superior to others; nor was the religion of any prophet more complete than the religion of any other.

But in one way Mohammad was different from other prophets: he was the last of the prophets, whereas the others were just prophets. In the words of the Quran, "Mohammad is the father of no man among you, but he is the Prophet of God, and the last of the messengers." (33: 40) Other prophets were intermediary links in the chain of prophethood: he was the final link. The Prophet himself put it this way: "I, and the Prophets who passed before me, can be linked to a palace, which had been built very beautifully, but one brick still remained to be put into place. Onlookers admired the beauty of the palace, but noticed that there was room for one more brick. I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets."

One, who studies the life and history of the Prophet Mohammad, will find some aspects which are not found in the lives of other prophets. The Quran has specified that he differed from other Prophets only in that he was the final Prophet. So it is important that we understand that these supplementary aspects are connected with his position as the last of the Prophets; they must be explained according to the concept of the finality of his Prophethood, rather than any other concept. That which is common to him and the other prophets can be attributed to his position as a prophet; that which is not common to him and the other prophets can be attributed to his position as the last of the Prophets.

For instance, Mohammad gained political supremacy over his opponents. His religion came to occupy a dominant and commanding position in a large portion of the world. There is a difference here between Mohammad and the other prophets, for this is something that is not found in others. The reason for this difference is that Mohammad was the last of the Prophets. Since no prophet was going to come after him, it was essential that the religion which he brought should be preserved. No power should be able to alter it. When the Book of God is altered, another prophet has to come to the world. Since, according to God's scheme, no other prophet was destined to come, it was imperative that permanent and reliable arrangements be made for the preservation of the Book that was revealed to Mohammad. This aim was achieved by means of political domination.

This was the special reason that Mohammad and his followers were granted supremacy over Arabia and the neighbouring countries. In this way, a government which was powerful enough to ensure the

preservation of the final Book of God for centuries was established. If this had not happened, the enemies of Islam would surely have destroyed the Quran, or changed it so much that it ceased to be the Book of guidance that it was really meant to be. The Prophet Mohammad was granted power so that the religion which he brought could be preserved. History shows that, through political domination, this aim was fully achieved.

This is the picture of the Prophet Mohammad which we obtain from the Quran, and the picture provided by the Quran can be the only accurate and true picture of him.

NOT BEING DECEIVED BY PRAISE

Dhiba Ibn Mahsan, a follower of the companions, says that he once said to Umer that he was a better man than Abu Bakr. On hearing this, Umer started weeping. "By God," he said, "one night and one day of Abu Bakr's are better than the whole life of Umer. Shall I tell you which night and day they were?" Dhiba asked him to do so. "It was the night the Prophet fled from the people of Mecca, along with Abu Bakr; and the day the Prophet died and Arab tribes apostasized, saying that they would pray but would not pay the poor due. I went to Abu Bakr and asked him, as successor of the Prophet, to be lenient with them. He told me that I had been brave in the time of ignorance, but had become a coward in the time of Islam. He swore a solemn oath that, if they refused to pay even one piece of rope that was due from them, then he would fight against them as long as he had the power to hold a sword in his hand.

From Denial to Belief

Professor Chandra Wickramasinghe is a Sri Lankan scientist, who heads the department of Applied Mathematics and Astronomy at University College, Cardiff, in Wales. He has been conducting research into the origin of life since 1962 in the company of an eminent English scientist, Professor Sir Fred Hoyle. The results of their research have been published in the form of a book entitled, *Evolution from Space*.

When the two scientists commenced their research they were both agreed on one point: that the notion of a Creator is inconsistent with science. But they were so shocked by the final result of their research that they had to revise their thinking. "From my earliest training as a scientist," Wickramasinghe says, "I was very strongly brainwashed to believe that science cannot be consistent with any kind of deliberate creation. That notion has had to be very painfully shed. I am quite uncomfortable in the situation – the state of mind I now find myself in. But there is no logical way out of it."

Both scientists made separate calculations into the mathematical chances of life having begun on earth spontaneously. Independently, they both arrived at the same conclusion: that the odds against life having ignited accidentally on earth were staggering in mathematical jargon 10 to the power of 40,000. Add 40,000 noughts to the figure 1 and you have the figure. "That number is such an imponderable in the universe that I am 100 percent certain that life could not have started spontaneously on Earth," says Wickramasinghe.

As they write in their book: "Once we saw that the probability of life originating at random is so utterly miniscule as to make it absurd, it became sensible to think that the properties of physics on which life depends are in every respect deliberate."

"Sir Frederick Hoyle was tending much more than I towards the higher intelligence Creator," Wickramasinghe explains. "I used to argue against it, but I found myself losing every argument. At the moment I can't find any rational argument to knock down the view which argues for conversion to God. If I could have found an argument – even a flimsy one – I would not have been a party to what we wrote in the book. We used to have open minds; now we realize that the only logical answer to life is creation, and not accidental shuffling. I still hope that one day I may go back to favour a purely mechanistic explanation – I say 'hope', because I still cannot come to terms with my conversion."

"My being a Buddhist – albeit not an ardent one – was never a problem, because it is an atheistic religion which does not profess to know anything about creation and does not have a creator built into it. But I now find myself driven to this position by logic. There is no other way in which we can understand the precise ordering of the chemicals of the universe except to invoke creation on a cosmic scale."

Until recently, belief in God was considered to be just a personal creed, not backed up by rational thought. In recent decades, however, this situation has changed. New evidence has again and again come to light which makes belief in God a scientifically credible concept, rather than just a personally desirable creed.

Science impresses on man the abstract reality of God's existence, but if there is a God, then what should man's relationship with Him be? Science does not, and cannot, answer this question. This is a question that can only be answered by religion.

Basically every religion answers this question. But it is clear from the present state of religions that besides Islam – no other religion is preserved in its original form. Some religions are rendered false by their not having a concept of God. Some say that there are many gods, but science does not back up this belief; all branches of science and knowledge are agreed on the fact that, if there is a God, it must be one God, not several. Some religions have been pervaded by ideas which the human conscience can never accept – ideas like bias on the basis of colour and race.

Just as science brings one to belief in God, it also brings one to belief in Islam, for Islam is the only religion consistent with scientific facts. Science shows that the universe has a God; this fact in itself is enough to prove agnostic religions wrong. Study of the cosmos shows that it operates in unity and harmony; this shows that there must be one God, as Islam teaches, not many gods, as other religions claim. No religion, except Islam, presents a true concept of God. No religion tells man what his relationship with God should be.

A Warning of What is to Come

In February 1983, forest fires devastated the hills of two states of Australia, South Australia and Victoria, leaving at least 71 people dead and 8000 homeless. The damage caused was estimated at £400 million.

Detective-Chief Inspector Bob Potts was one of the many volunteers who helped in the rescue work. For a day and a night he fought the fire in temperatures of 108 degrees and winds of 40 knots. This is how Bob Potts described his impressions: "We are full of stories but what I will recall is the sense of inadequacy. It was man versus nature and although it may sound dramatic, no amount of resources would have helped. Nature overwhelmed us."

Some of the homeless, however, saw the matter less dispassionately. Lyn Lamshed, whose house was burnt down, had this to say: "I do cry and I do feel anger, but most of the time I just feel empty. We never thought this would happen. This is a low-risk fire area."

These two contrasting reactions are typical of the different concepts concerning the disasters which afflict man in this world. The first attitude is that which has been taught by the Prophets, and the second that of the philosophers. The Prophets taught that worldly catastrophes like earthquakes, forest fires, droughts, and hurricanes, are a sign of God; they are nature's warning of the more immense catastrophe which is going to overtake us in the hereafter. When such calamities strike in this world, man is helpless before the might of nature. How much more helpless he will be before God when He appears in all His might and glory in the next world. On that day the curtain that obscures our vision of realities will be drawn back and they will be plain to see. In this world a crack sometimes opens in the curtain and we are given a glimpse of the realities which will be fully visible in the hereafter. This happens so that we may take heed and prepare for that day before it is upon us.

This is the attitude that the Prophets have taught man to have towards natural disasters. One should look at them as a sign of God – a warning – and take heed. But philosophers look at these events from another angle; they do not see them in their overall context; they look at them as tragic event in man's life and give them the heading 'Problem of Evil'.

The Calamities which afflict man in this world are a reminder of his helplessness. They make him mentally capable of discovering the true nature of things and becoming worthy of God's blessings. In the next, everlasting world, man will be truly free and independent. He will be absolutely immune from all forms of pain and anguish. But this rank will not be awarded to men by right; it will be a reward for their actions. Whoever consciously submits to God is worthy to be blessed with freedom; whoever is content to be powerless proves that he is deserving to be invested with power in the perfect and everlasting world of God.

When the whistle blows, passengers know that the train is about to move out of the station. They treat it as a signal – a warning – that if they do not take their seats immediately the train will leave without them. When they look at it this way, they see the whistle as something useful and proper. If they were to look at it as noise pollution, however, then they would not see it in its true light. They would not be able to take heed of the warning that it gives them. they would just see it as an evil. So it is with the calamities that strike man in this world. They can be seen in their true context and treated as a warning or they can be looked at as just inexplicable manifestations of evil.

TAKING NO NOTICE OF PRAISE AND FLATTERY

Some people told Umer that they had never seen anyone more just, truthful and severe with hypocrites, than him. “Commander of the faithful,” they said, “You are the best person after the Prophet.” Auf Ibn Malik was also present at the time. When he heard this, he told these people that what they said was not true. “After the Prophet, we have seen better than Umer,” he said. They asked who that person was. Auf told them that it was Abu Bakr. Then Umer himself spoke up: “Auf is right and you people are wrong,” he said. “God knows, the fragrance of musk is nothing compared to the purity of Abu Bakr; and as for me, I am more misguided than the camels of my household.”

A Perfect World

Until recently, people in heavily industrialized areas of the world considered the smoke pouring from their factory chimneys as a sign of prosperity. They saw in it the solution to their problems, and security for the future.

The problem of pollution first reared its head in the 1960's. At that time the Germans tried to deal with it by building colossal chimney stacks which, it was hoped, would serve to protect the environment. It turned out, however, that this measure only succeeded in spreading pollution farther afield.

Now the destructive properties of the smoke which used to be considered a sign of prosperity are becoming fully apparent. This smoke contains a high quantity of sulphur dioxide, which is transformed into sulphuric acid in the atmosphere. This sulphuric acid then mixes with the rainfall, and falls to the ground in the form of acid rain.

Acid rain is causing immense damage to man's environment. A report recently published by the National Academy of Sciences in America states that in eastern Canada and the north-eastern part of the United States, some lakes and streams have been stripped of aquatic life. Scientists are also concerned that the acids may free metals in lake and stream sediments, posing a potential threat to drinking water supplies.

The damage is heaviest where industrialization is heaviest. In Germany, for instance, 300,000 acres of trees in Bavaria alone are reported to be suffering from the effects of acid rain. At the last count, in 1982, 10 per cent of the German forest was said to be dead or dying. Vast measures are being proposed to meet this threat, but all of them are either scientifically impractical or economically unfeasible.

What hopes man associated with industrial civilization but how savagely those hopes have been dashed. He thought that industrial civilization would provide the perfect world he longs for, but it has only provided him with more afflictions. Man has been given everything he requires in this world: he feels hungry and has been given food to satisfy his hunger; he feels thirsty and has been given sleep to replenish and restore him. But there is one thing that man has not been given, and that is the perfect world that he longs for more than anything. The means required for such a perfect world are present in this world, but every time it seems to be within man's reach, worldly limitations prevent him from achieving it. One can only conclude that the perfect world that man desires is destined for another world; only if we seek it there can our dreams be fulfilled. But man's misfortune is that he seeks perfection in this ephemeral world where experience shows that it cannot be obtained.

Healthy Criticism

In the June 1983 British General Election, Mrs. Thatcher easily won another term as Prime Minister. One of the first things she did after her election was sack her foreign minister, Mr. Francis Pym.

A descendent of John Pym (1584-1643), whose power during the reign of Charles I was so great that he was known as 'King Pym', Sir Francis Pym had all the qualities and dignity of a capable and respected statesman. He had held high cabinet office. Why, then, did Mrs. Thatcher dismiss him from her government? The reason was that he had said something during the election campaign that Mrs. Thatcher had not liked. Discussing the role of the opposition in government, he had said that "a strong opposition is indispensable ingredient of good government," the reason being that "no government is perfect." Mrs. Thatcher was unable to tolerate this remark, and dismissed Sir Francis from his cabinet post.

Being unable to abide criticism is a common human weakness. Its most damaging effect is to rob one of one's friends.

No great task can be accomplished without the help of friends who are fully equipped for the task. The only way to bring such people together is to put up with their criticism. Intelligent people cannot suppress their thoughts. A broad-minded leader, then, will let them freely express themselves; he will not be angered at their dissent. In this way he will ensure the continued allegiance of valuable friends. One who is narrow-minded, however, will not be able to appreciate the worth of such people. The result will be that a mediocre group of people will gather around him who have the calibre neither to perform great deeds, nor to comprehend them.

A Tyrant's Change of Heart

In the fourteenth century A.D. the Mongol tribe overran the Muslim empire, totally subverting Muslim rule and civilization in Iraq, Iran and Turkistan. Latter, however, God mellowed their hearts, and the vast majority of them accepted Islam, thus becoming custodians of the Muslim faith.

The effect of missionary activity in those times can be judged from the story of Sheikh Jamaluddin. One day "he was on his way somewhere, and happened to pass by the place where the Mongol prince, Tughlaq Timur, was out hunting. The latter was heir to the Chughtai branch of the Mongols, which was ruling over Iran at that time. The Mongols, in those times considered Iranians unlucky, and since the prince's soldiers took the presence of an Iranian in their hunting ground as an evil omen, they arrested him and brought him before the prince. On seeing him the prince became furious. "A dog is better than one of you Iranians," he shouted in anger. Sheikh Jamaluddin answered this abuse calmly. "If we had not found true religion then we would certainly have been worse than dogs," he said.

Though the Mongols were a barbaric tribe they were not inhuman by nature. They were a sincere people. For this reason Tughlaq Timur was profoundly shaken by the Iranian's reply. He gave order for the Sheikh to be brought to him when he had finished hunting. When Sheikh Jamaluddin was brought before him, he took him aside and asked him what that religion was that he had found. Fearlessly the Sheikh explained to him all the teachings of Islam. This conversation brought about a change of heart in the prince. He realized the danger of dying in a state of infidelity, and expressed his willingness to accept Islam. But he was still a prince, not yet a king. "If I accept Islam now," he said, "I will not be able to bring my subjects into the Islamic fold." Then he addressed Sheikh Jamaluddin saying, "Go for the present. When you hear that I have been crowned king, come and see me."

Sheikh Jamaluddin returned home and waited for the news of Tughlaq Timur's coronation; but it was not to come during his lifetime. Lying on his death-bed, he called his son Sheikh Rashiduddin and told him the whole story about the Mongol prince. Then he said to him, "I have been waiting for an auspicious moment, but now it seems that it will not come during my lifetime, so my last wish is that when the news of Tughlaq Timur's coronation reaches you, you should go to him, convey my regards and remind him boldly of our encounter when he was out hunting. Perhaps God will open his heart to Islam.

When Sheikh Jamaluddin died, his son eagerly awaited the coronation of the Mongol prince. Before long the much awaited news of his coronation arrived. Immediately he set off. When he reached destination the gatemen would not allow him inside the king's tent, because he was unable to give them his reasons for wanting to see the king. So he decided to set up his camp under a tree near the king's tent.

One day he got up for the morning prayer. In the stillness of the early morning he made the call to prayer in a loud voice. The sound of his voice penetrated the tent where Tughlaq Timur was asleep. The king was offended at what seemed to him to be a meaningless noise at such an early hour. He told his servants to arrest the madman who was making it, and bring him to his tent. So the Sheikh was brought before the king.

Tughlaq Timur started asking him why he was making a noise next to his tent. The Sheikh recounted the whole story of his father's meeting him. "When my father said to you that if we had not found the truth, we would truly be worse than dogs, you said that at that time you could not commit yourself and told him to come and see you when you had been crowned king. My father was awaiting this day till he breathed his last. In accordance with his dying wish, I have come to you to remind you of the incident."

The king gave an attentive hearing to the whole story. "I remember my promise," he said finally. "I have been awaiting your arrival." Then he summoned his minister and told him that he had been keeping something to himself, of which an Iranian dervish had reminded him that day. "I intend to accept Islam," he said. "What is your opinion?" he asked.

"I have also been keeping the same secret to myself," the minister answered. "I have realized that Islam is the true faith."

Then both the king and Vizir accepted Islam from the hands of Sheikh Rashiduddin. The rest of the courtiers did likewise. On the day of the king's conversion no less than 160,000 people entered the fold of Islam, and all of the Mongols living in Iran eventually followed suit.

Total Involvement

Elias Howe (1819-1867) was born in Massachusetts, U.S.A. He died at the young age of 48. Although his life was short, his contribution to the world of clothes – that of the sewing machine – will always be remembered.

The sewing machine invented by Elias Howe was at first utilized, not for sewing clothes, but for stitching shoes. The main breakthrough was the development of a lock-stitch by a shuttle carrying a lower thread and a needle carrying an upper thread which passed through a hole situated at the tip of the needle.

For thousands of years, people had been accustomed to making a hole at the base of the needle. So, following their lead, Elias Howe made the needle of his machine with a hole at the base, instead of at the tip as is now the practice. The placement of an eyelet, simple as it may seem to us now, remained a big hurdle for its inventor for quite some time. It was only a dream which finally brought about the desired solution.

As he was racking his brain to perfect his machine, Howe dreamt that he had been captured by a primitive tribe and was ordered to produce an operational sewing machine within twenty-four hours, failing which he would be speared to death. He tried hard, but could not accomplish it. When the deadline was up, the tribesmen surrounded him and raised their spears to kill him. Scared, yet still concentrating, he observed that each spear had an eyelet at the tip. He kept on gazing at the eyelet and then woke up with a start: the solution was right before him. For the machine to work, the placement of the hole had to be neither in the middle nor at the base, but at the tip. His lucky dream helped him, in 1845, to produce a sewing machine that would complete 250 stitches a minute.

What is a dream? It is the result of complete involvement. What we think about during the day, we dream about at night. Howe succeeded in inventing a machine only because he had engrossed himself in it to such an extent that he came to dream about it. Such is the case with any undertaking, whether one wants to invent a machine, or bring about a revolution in human life. One achieves success in one's aim only after complete involvement; only when the thing one has set one's mind on becomes a part of the subconscious existence that is reflected in one's dreams.

Both on One Plane

On March 31, 1981, the main story in newspapers all over the world was the assassination attempt on President Reagan. A youth had fired six shots at the President in the space of 2 seconds with an automatic pistol. One bullet had entered his chest and settled in his lung. Before he reached hospital, he lost half the blood of his body. But emergency treatment came to his assistance and his life was saved.

Before long the President was well on the way to recovery and chatting with the doctors and nurses in his hospital ward. He recalled his earlier career as a film-star, in which he had never achieved outstanding fame. One of the remarks he made in this connection was: "If I'd got this much attention in Hollywood, I would never have left."

Why did John Hinckley commit this deed? He was in love with a young actress by the name of Jodie Foster. He had written to her time and time again, but had received no response. Eventually, one day before his attack on President Reagan, he wrote to her saying: "Now you' ll know who I am."

Next day this unknown youth had made headlines all over the world; he had become big news; his name could be heard on radios and television sets in every country of the globe. Just by pulling a trigger, he had achieved more fame than other do after a lifetime of effort.

Hinckley was a would-be assassin, Ronald Reagan his victim, but in as much as both were after fame both of them were the same. One person may seem to be a criminal, and another innocent, but if both are seeking worldly gain, then they are both living on the same plane. In this world, people are judged on appearances: in the next world, they will be judged according to realities. No matter what one is doing on earth, no matter whether one's efforts seem to be directed towards a noble or an ignoble end, if one is working for fame, then one will have nothing but ignominy to look forward to when one comes before God.

An Old Woman's Courage

Mamun Rashid (108-218 A.H.), a caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, although known for his ruthless treatment of political adversaries was very kind and considerate towards the common people. Once an old woman of Baghdad entered his court and approached him. "I am a poor woman," she complained to the caliph. "I once owned a plot of land, but it has been taken away from me by a tyrant. He would not listen to my cries, so I have come to you to ask for justice."

"Who is it who has maltreated you in this way?", the caliph asked. The old woman pointed to the person sitting next to the caliph. Mamun Rashid saw that it was his own son, Abbas, that she was pointing at. He ordered his *Vizir*, i.e. his chief advisor, to take Abbas and stand him up next to the old woman. This order was carried out. Now the caliph asked them both to state their cases.

The prince spoke falteringly and in an undertone. But the old woman spoke firmly and in a loud voice. The *Vizir* admonished her to talk softly and with respect as she was in the presence of the caliph. But the caliph intervened, and said that she should be free to express herself as she wished. It was the truth that had made the old woman speak loudly; and falsehood which had made the prince dumb. She was found justified in her claim. The case was decided in her favour and the land returned to her.

The truth is a force in itself. The conviction of being in the right makes one bold. One who utters the truth does so without fear. His speech is free from contradiction and artificiality. There is no inconsistency in what he says. There is no trace of guilt on his face when he speaks, and no hesitancy in his voice. As a result, there is a power in the voice of one who is in the right which convinces the listener.

If one's case is false, however, one cannot speak convincingly. One's guilty conscience will manifest itself in one's voice; one's face will reflect a lack of inner conviction. The attempt to make one's lies credible will be full of obvious contradictions. In spite of having a tongue, one will be as good as speechless. One should remember always that God is one's witness.

The Role of Religion

What is the role of religion in a person's life? Is it meant to influence all aspects of one's existence, and does it? Or should it have an exclusive compartment in one's life, with no regard for and connection with its other parts?

Such questions, which frequently arise about religion, are due to a superficial study of the subject. If religion could be viewed in its true perspective, all such questions would cease to matter or simply disappear.

What really is religion? In its essence, religion is another name for a divinely-inspired life springing from realization of God. It is for the discovery of God to dominate one's whole life. The discovery of the Creator by the creature, the meeting of the All Powerful by the powerless, is the greatest of all the discoveries that man can make. An event of such stunning intensity does not affect one's life in a partial way; it transforms one's whole being.

Religion is inherent in every action of the true believer just as dye is inherent in every drop of coloured water. The words and deeds of such a person bear the stamp of his faith. With the discovery of God grows a new personality which is reflected in every action. Religion and the person become inseparable.

Bird and Man

Salim Ali is India's most renowned ornithologist. Now aged 87, he became interested in bird watching when just ten years of age. Since then he has spent the greater part of his life with binoculars in hand, a camera strung across one shoulder and a bag containing 19 essential equipments on the other. Most of the time he is to be found in the countryside, watching birds and observing their habits. He has traveled far and wide in pursuit of his interest, and is said to be even more widely traveled than Jawahar Lal Nehru. It is not surprising, then, that people call him a birdman. His expertise in the study of birds has earned him many national and international awards.

More than 2000 species of birds are found in India. Salim Ali's study of them has enabled him to write many books on the subject. One of his books, *The Handbook of Indian Birds*, was the result of 20 years of intensive study.

Recently Mr. Ali was interviewed at his home in Bombay by a correspondent of a major Indian national daily newspaper. The journalist found him courteous and urbane to a quite exceptional degree and it occurred to him that perhaps this immense courtesy in some way was derived from his observation of birds: In his report of the interview (*The Times of India* September 2, 1983) he wrote: "Perhaps a course in bird-watching should be recommended to make men more human."

Innumerable species of birds and animals are to be found in the world. In ancient times, man knew very little about them, but in the present age extensive study has been made of the different animals that inhabit the earth, and much information about them has been accumulated. Nowadays, there are various ways that man can become acquainted with animals' way of life. This is one of the purposes behind aviaries and zoos.

Zoology, the science of animals, is a permanent feature of the curricula of most universities. Man has a good example in the animals, for they live perfectly natural lives, whereas he deviates time and time again from the path of nature. If man would only follow in the path of animals, this in itself would be enough to earn him salvation.

Historical Prophet

I have accepted Islam in all sincerity and earnestness, and the first reason that has moved me to do so is its solid historical groundwork. After wandering helplessly for several years in the marshy bogs of divergent creeds and conflicting systems of philosophy, my weary soul has at last found refuge and consolation in a religion based on a Revelation that has remained unaltered ever since its first compilation under the third Caliph, and in a prophet whose historical personality is not only unquestionable but about whose youth, appearance, daily habits and even personal characteristics we know almost as much as we do about those of Oliver Cromwell or of Napoleon Bonaparte. You cannot throw even the least shadow of doubt on the historical basis of that immense personality that has stamped itself so deep on the roll of time as to make Christendom grow pale before that august and illustrious name even to this day.

In the Prophet of Islam there is nothing vague and shadowy, mythical or mysterious, as, for instance, in Zoroaster and Srikrishna, or in Buddha and Christ. The very existence of those prophets has been seriously doubted and even totally denied; but nobody, as far as I am aware, has ever ventured to reduce the prophet of Islam either into a "solar myth" or into a "fairy tale" as some eminent savants of Europe have done with Buddha and Christ.

Oh! What a relief to find, after all, a truly historical prophet to believe in.

From "*Why Have I Accepted Islam?*" A lecture delivered on the 26th August 1904, in Hyderabad, by Dr. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya (Muslim name: Muhammad Azizuddin).

20 March 1984

CURBING ANGER MAKES ONE GROW IN FAITH

Abdullah Ibn Abbas reports the Prophet's saying: "There is nothing dearer to God than a person should curb his anger. When one curbs one's anger for God's sake, He fills one's soul with faith."

On Seeing Prayer

Henry de Castro was a French officer, who, during the French occupation of Algeria held a high Government post. One day he was riding out on a mission through the desert. Behind him were thirty Arab horsemen who served under him. During the journey the time came for the afternoon prayer. They told their officer that it was time for prayer, and without waiting for his permission, they dismounted. After giving the call to prayer aloud they stood in rows to pray. The French officer felt affronted at this arrogant behaviour on their part, but he kept silent. He stopped his horse and observed the Arabs in their prayer. The sight of praying in even rows had a profound effect on him. Afterwards when they had finished praying, he began to ask them questions about prayer, and listened attentively to their answers.

The boldness of the Arabs and the sight of prayer in such array made a deep impression on Henry de Castro. When he returned home he started to study Islam. First of all he read a French translation of the Quran. Then he traveled extensively in Arab countries to observe the Islamic way of life, his impressions became more and more profound. Eventually he accepted Islam.

Thereafter he wrote a book in French on how he had come to accept Islam. This book was translated into Arabic by the famous Egyptian writer, Fathi Zaghlul. It was published under the title of *"Al-Islam: Khawater wa Sawaneh"*.

At first the French officer thought that the Arabs were being proud in their action, so he felt offended; but when he saw them dismount from their horses in order to bow down humbly before the Lord of the Universe, he realized that what they had done had been out of humility, not pride. His true nature awakened within him. The sight of God's servants bowing down before Him so inspired a feeling of submission to God within him, that eventually he entered the fold of the religion of God.

Worthy of Dependence

On September 15, 1983, the Prime Minister of Israel, Menachem Begin, finally announced his resignation. He had held the reins of power in Israel for six years. At the time of his resignation, Mr. Begin was so dispirited that he had gone into total hiding, refusing to meet reporters and remaining totally uninterested in the political issues of the day. He did not even personally visit the President of Israel, Mr. Herzog, to deliver his resignation.

Menachem Begin, who won fame as leader of the underground terrorist organization, Irgur, was thought of as a man of iron. Many political observers in Jerusalem consider it inconceivable that a man of Begin's drive and determination should leave office while Israeli troops are still in the Lebanon, the colonization of the West Bank is still uncompleted and the economy is falling apart. As one well-placed diplomatic source in Jerusalem put it: "Mr. Begin is just not the sort of man to walk away from Israel's problems at this difficult stage in the country's development. He has just turned 70 and it is an age when serving politicians fix their eyes on their place in history."

Why, at such a delicate time, has Mr. Begin decided to resign? The main reason appears to have been the personal tragedy which struck him last autumn - the death of his wife, whom he married in Poland in 1939 and who remained the object of his lifelong devotion. "The news of her death," James Macmanus writes in *the Guardian Weekly* (September 4, 1983) "was broken to Mr. Begin on board a plane flying across the United States. Those on the flight recall the ghastly pallor that replaced the Prime Minister's usually ruddy complexion and their fear that he was going to have another heart-attack." So great was the Prime Minister's sorrow that, when the American ambassador to Israel, Samuel Lewis visited him a few weeks before his resignation, he found the prime minister deeply depressed and almost totally uninterested in the political issues of the day. The diplomat exclaimed afterwards, to Mr. Begin's aides: "Why is it impossible to get him out of this mood?" The only reply he received was that the prime minister appeared to be suffering from incurable sorrow.

Man instinctively needs some point on which to focus his emotions. This feeling is present in every human being; no one can take it away from him. If one makes God the focal point of one's emotions, one will never despair or become dispirited, for God is eternal. If, on the other hand, one concentrates one's feelings on something else besides God, one will not be able to avoid despair and depression. All things besides God will perish. Sooner or later, they will desert man. Those who concentrate their feelings on God are grasping a firm handle that will never break. But those who attach themselves to other things besides God, are grasping a handle which one day will slip from their hands, for everything other than God is mortal. When this happens one will be left in the state of sorrow and remorse that we witness in Mr. Begin's case.

CHOGM

Commonwealth heads of government from 44 countries (CHOGM) met in New Delhi from 23 to 29 November, 1983. The CHOGM members who between them control the destinies of one fourth of the world's population, addressed an appeal to the two super powers to resume a genuine political dialogue, a commentator, referring to the long communiqué issued at the conclusion of the meeting, observes:

"It would be quoted off and on in the international community whenever there are moves for peace, disarmament and reduction of tension."

This communiqué cost 50 crore rupees (5 billion) to prepare; but it will surely remain ineffective like so many of its predecessors. The reason is very simple. It makes an appeal to other governments to practice something which its progenitors preach but do not themselves practice. Nowadays it all too often happens that countries who protest against injustice in other countries are themselves guilty of injustice in their own spheres of influence. Advice given by such countries does not ring true, and does little good either to the preachers or those for whom these homilies are meant.